

100 Random Reflections about Forgiveness

Pastor Joseph Clark – September 13, 2020

"Forgiving is one of the most difficult things for a human being to do, but I think it means looking at some slight you feel, putting yourself in the position of the other person, and wiping away any sort of resentment and antagonism you feel toward them. Then let that other person know that everything is perfectly friendly and normal between you."

~ President Jimmy Carter

"He who is devoid of the power to forgive, is devoid of the power to love."

~ Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr

Serial killer Gary Leon Ridgway committed dozens of murders commencing in and around 1982. He was convicted of killing 48 women around Washington's South King County (that number changed to 49 as part of a plea bargain), but it is likely that the number of his victims could be as high as 90 women in total. He is considered one of the most prolific serial killers in history, and he was given the nickname of "The Green River Killer" after five of his victims were found in the Washington River before his actual identity was revealed. Many of his victims were prostitutes and or runaways. He would bring them to his home, strangle them to death, then dump their bodies in far-off wooded areas. Frequently he returned to have intercourse with the bodies. To friends and neighbours, he was a married man of faith. After his arrest plead guilty to the murders in 2003. The families of the victims were allowed to make victim impact statements to him in the presence of the court. Many expressed their emotional distain at him. Expressing their hatred and pain for what he had done. However, this statement by the father of one of the victims, is truly remarkable.

"Mr. Ridgeway. There are people here who hate you. I am not one of them. You have made it difficult to live up to what I believe. And that is what God says to do. And that is, to forgive. You are forgiven, Sir."

I once spoke with a therapist who believed that forgiveness only took place after the offender apologized and made restitution. I asked him, “What if they do not apologize? In fact, what if you forgave them without them even knowing it?” He replied. “That is cheap forgiveness. It is half baked.” I thought to myself, how sad. Here is a person who people turn to for mental health and emotional help, and he has such an obtuse and incomplete view of forgiveness himself.

I believe that there is no such thing as cheap forgiveness. There is no such thing as strong forgiveness. There is no such thing as low calories forgiveness or caffeine free forgiveness. Forgiveness simply is or is not. It must be true and unconditional. Otherwise it is not forgiveness. It is not a response to a negotiation or trade off. It is not subject to terms. One should not say, “I will forgive you if...” or “I will forgive you when...” and expect it to be true and relieve their pain. One must forgive regardless. All other arrangements or gestures involved such as restitution, or an apology, are simply logistics or even worse, stumbling blocks.

Jesus taught us in the Word:

²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

²³ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

²⁴ And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

²⁵ But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

²⁶ The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

²⁷ Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

²⁹ And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

³⁰ And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

³¹ So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

³² Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

³³ Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

³⁴ And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

³⁵ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.

-Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness is evidence of, and the foundation of, our salvation. Here are 100 random reflections about forgiveness:

- Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude.
- The term ‘forgive’ derives from ‘give’ or to ‘grant’, as in ‘to give up,’ or ‘cease to harbor (resentment, wrath). ~Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Desmond Tutu once wrote “To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self interest.”

"Forgiveness is about mercy, not justice," ~Sister Christine Vladimiroff

ScienceDaily (Mar. 3, 2008) — Forgiveness can be a powerful means to healing, but it does not come naturally for both sexes. Men have a harder time forgiving than women do, according to Case Western Reserve University psychologist Julie Juola Exline. But that can change if men develop empathy toward an offender by seeing

they may also be capable of similar actions. Then the gender gap closes, and men become less vengeful.

- Forgiveness needs to take place as a personal commitment. Most of the time, nobody apologizes or asks for forgiveness.
- When missionaries first came to Labrador, they found no word for forgiveness in the local native language. So, they made one which meant: “Not being able to think about it anymore.”
- Forgiveness does not require understanding. Understanding, analysis, and dissecting an event or someone’s motives or reasons will not enable the healing process. In my experience it simply prolongs the hurt.
- The ancient Hebrew word for forgiveness is “Kaphar.” Which means to cleanse and purge away.

Learning to forgive is not gaining an ability we do not already possess. It is the art of uncovering that which is divine and inherent in us. Once you have uncovered and discovered this is in you, it gets stronger with realization and practice like the mastery of any skill or mechanical ability.

Forgiving is a choice. Emotions are choices. Choosing to forgive someone is first and foremost a commitment to yourself. It is normal for it to take time in some cases. It also can take enormous self discipline and determination.

“Hate is an acid that destroys the vessel it is carried in.” ~Ann Landers

Forgiving someone who has wronged you does not mean that you have to tell them that you have forgiven them. Once I had to forgive someone, I never met for wronging me in a very personal manner. I will never meet or speak to this person; however, I forgave them, nonetheless. This was rewarding because it was the right thing to do and it brought me peace. I firmly believe that I am a better person for doing this and I feel at harmony with the divine.

- Forgiving someone who has caused you enormous hurt could be an accomplishment of a lifetime. Are you up for it?
- Self discipline is a factor of forgiveness. It is easy to get clouded when we are emotionally affected by something. When I get this way, I have to remind myself that my soul and my spirit is not hurt by the offense. Only my ego, my false sense of persona.

- How do we forgive those who harmed us and are now deceased? The same way you forgive anyone who is alive. You just do.
- The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong.

“Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was you.”

~Holocaust Survivor

- Accept that regardless of the problem, love is hate’s only solution.
- To forgive is to take a leadership role and put an end to conflict. For if you forgive, you will surely not contribute to the conflict further.

Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle

When you choose to change the way you look at something, the thing you look at changes in response.

- Not all forgiveness means a repaired relationship. In many situations it is rewarding and helpful for you to forgive for your own peace of mind. Enabling you to go on in harmony without taking grief or hostility into another relationship.

“By love alone, hatred ceases.” “To err is human, to forgive is divine.”

~Alexander Pope

- The Amish have a very profound commitment to forgiveness. They believe in a distinction between forgiveness, pardon, and or reconciliation. For pardon and or reconciliation to occur a two-way relationship and dialogue have to take place. However, they extend forgiveness regardless of the stance or position of those who committed the offence.
- Forgiveness is not a destination to arrive it. It is a journey that begins with the first step. That first step being to choose to forgive and glorify God through that act of forgiveness.

“Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated.”

~Coretta Scott King

- An apology is not a prerequisite for forgiveness.
- Others do not define us. We define ourselves. Others do not validate us. We validate ourselves.
- Why is it difficult to forgive someone who has included us in their personal shame? Others cannot shame us. We can only shame ourselves.

A major roadblock to forgiveness is allowing recurring thoughts, flashbacks, and analysis of the wrong to take place. One must discipline themselves to not let invasive memories to own them. In counselling, there is an old adage, “Analysis = Paralysis”. Don’t be a victim. Put your mind at ease. You owe it to yourself not to think or obsess about past wrongs. Be it your own, or someone else’s.

“I can forgive, but never forget, is only another way of saying, I will not forgive. Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note, torn in two and burned up so that it never can be shown against one.” ~ Henry Ward Beacher

- The longest journey we will ever take is from the head to the heart.
- Negative experiences stimulate growth and strengthen those wise enough to learn from their pain rather than wallow in their pain.

Forgiveness is the key element of any relationship. Without it all other elements are pointless. When I need to forgive someone and I find it becomes a lengthy and challenging process, (much like the gradual ascent of a graph with ups and downs) I have to reassure myself to settle for: “I want to forgive this person, I want to have faith in this person again, I want to trust this person again.” And eventually it will come to pass that I will forgive them. I will have faith and hope and trust.

"You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well." ~Lewis B. Smedes

- If it is convenient, chances are it is not true forgiveness. The key to forgiving is in sharing one’s heart even though your pride tells you not to.

“Pray you now, forget and forgive.” ~William Shakespeare

“He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself; for every man has need to be forgiven.” ~Thomas Fuller

“Forgiveness is the economy of the heart. forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits.” ~ Hannah More

“It takes one person to forgive, it takes two people to be reunited.”

~Lewis B. Smedes

“Never forget the three powerful resources you always have available to you: love, prayer and forgiveness.” ~H.Jackson Brown, Jr.

“When we forgive evil, we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it.”

~Lewis B. Smedes

- Forgiving someone does not ensure that they will ever react or behave the way you prefer.
- Forgive to release yourself from the conflict. Forgive without expectation.

“When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.”

~Catherine Ponder

- Forgiveness is not passiveness! Forgiveness is not indifference! You are not becoming a doormat by forgiving.
- Forgiveness is taking the most crucial and strongest role in any conflict.
- Forgiving takes guts.
- Resentment is too darn easy. It takes no effort nor does it challenge character or initiate growth. It's just bad. Weak.

- Forgiveness is not simply a word. Do not make the mistake of lying to yourself or others by abusing the word or throwing it out there haphazardly.
- Forgiveness is a process. It takes time and it is a course and a commitment.
- True forgiveness challenges the emotions, the spirit, and our intellect. You gotta have heart.
- I was able to forgive and stop my grief when I stopped thinking of myself as a victim of a violation. Rather, I considered myself a survivor of an unfortunate human experience. It also helped to examine carefully my participation in the conflict and realize that I shared in the mistake.
- I am a recipient of an invaluable character strengthening learning experience.
- I had to be patient with my process of forgiveness. The journey had peaks and valleys. There were days where I felt I was over it completely. Other days I questioned if I was ever going to heal. Be patient.
- Rather than be opposed to what happened to you, be in favor of how you will move beyond it. Look at it from a positive angle.

Love and accept yourself. What happened to you does not define you. How you deal with it is how you choose to define yourself.

“There's no point in burying a hatchet if you're going to put up a marker on the site.”
~Sydney Harris

- Forgiveness is timeless. It has been around as long as there has been conscious thought and ability to reason.
- It is a well that never runs dry. You can forgive as often and with as many people as you choose.
- Do they deserve to be forgiven? Always. Otherwise you are only hurting yourself. This does not mean you expose yourself to further hurt. Be prudent. But forgive.

While on my journey of forgiveness one of the greatest stumbling blocks for me was passing judgement. Nothing caused me more delay, pain and fear than analyzing the situation in order to pass my own judgement on it. I had to understand in order to pass judgement and know what I was forgiving. What I learned was no amount of judgement will make it easier to forgive. Judgement is a roadblock to forgiveness.

Perhaps there are degrees of forgiveness. For example, there is self forgiveness. There is forgiving someone in your heart in order to release yourself of hurt even though they may never repent, apologize or redeem themselves. There is forgiving someone who has apologized. There is forgiving in order to reconcile a relationship. And there is forgiving someone in order to bring peace as you travel separate ways.

“A forgiving spirit is therefore absolutely necessary, as ever we hope for pardon of our own sins, as ever we hope for peace of mind in our dying moments, or for the divine mercy at that day when we shall most stand in need of it.”

~Bishop Joseph Butler

Forgiveness
by Barry S. Maltese

If you try to reach inside of your heart
you can find forgiveness, or at least the start
And from that place where you can forgive
is where Hope, and Love, also thrive and live

And with each step that you try to take
and with that chance that your heart might break
Comes so much happiness, and so much strength
which Alone can carry you a fantastic length

For hate and anger will not get you there
and though you say that you just don't care
You can EASILY avoid the pain on which hate feeds
. . . the kind of hurt that No one needs

Just make the move, take that first stride
let go of the thing known as "Foolish Pride"
Maybe then you can start to repair the past
into something strong, that will mend, and last!

- True forgiveness is not an ego driven righteousness. It is a truly enlightened act of goodwill and compassion.
- Even better than forgiving is not to pass judgement or assign blame in the first place.

Lyrics to “Forgiveness” by Leona Lewis

“Starting today, I’m gunna change,
 Don't wanna make the same mistakes,
 Cos I can see a new horizon,
 The ice around my heart is melting,
 And the hurt I feel is slowly dying,
 Now I’m, no longer crying,
 The bridge we burnt is being built again,
 It’s leading to a new beginning,
 And it may never be the way it was,
 And that’s because I’m talking about forgiveness,
 Forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness”

- Resentment clouds judgement and accelerates the lower self. It can fuel very regretful acts.

“Rare is the person who can weigh the faults of others without his thumb on the scale.”
 ~ Byron Langfeld

- Ruining relationships throughout one’s life simply to have the satisfaction of delusionally convincing yourself that you are always right, or that you are never to blame, is social suicide. It will result in self loathing, loneliness and regret.

Many child counsellors and authorities on child rearing advise: “Your children need your love and patience when they least deserve it.” As a parent I absolutely agree with this statement. From a perspective of human relationships this is true about anyone. In order to succeed, a relationship requires compassion when it least deserves it. It is easy to have patience and compassion when all is well and unchallenging. However, do we double our efforts and apply unconditional patience and compassion when the situation really tries us?

- Waiting until the pain goes away before we forgive is pointless. Do we wait for a headache to go away before taking aspirin? Do we wait for our hunger to go away before we feed ourselves? Forgiving is part of the process of ridding us of hurt.
- “Life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% how we react to what happens to us.”

“If one by one we counted people out
for the least sin, it wouldn't take us long
to get so we had no one left to live with.
For to be social is to be forgiving.”

~Robert Frost

- The best advice I can give is to forgive by releasing yourself of the pain associated with someone who wronged you and all associated events. Thus, over time, eliminating your hurt, resulting in happiness.

What is happening to you right now? At this present moment is the offender or event harming you? When I felt myself getting worked up over past event and offences, I focused on my breathing and asked myself what is happening to me right now? Usually the answer was “nothing”. Then I applied a higher path mode of addressing the situation. Taking a leadership role in the situation was empowering and restored confidence in my capabilities to be forgiving and true to myself.

- Time will only heal wounds if you don't repeatedly open those wounds.
- For me this was a massive challenge. I let the past haunt me to the extent that it affected my health, my relationships, and my judgement. Once I chose and disciplined myself to release the past, I was free and much stronger than ever before as a result of the entire experience.

Any fool can criticize, condemn, and complain but it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving.”

~Dale Carnegie

Most dictionaries define forgiveness as:

- 1) To give up resentment or claim to requital for an insult.
- 2) To cease to feel resentment against an offender: See pardon.

- Many clinics define forgiveness as a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge.
- Forgiveness allows you to release the grip of hurt and allow you to live a worthwhile existence.
- A strong person over time might even empathize with the offender.

"Since irritation, anger, hate and resentment have such a powerful effect in producing ill-health, what is the antidote? Obviously, it is to fill the mind with attitudes of good will, forgiveness, faith, love and the spirit of imperturbability...."

~ Rev Norman Vincent Peale

"It's a process, not a moment," says Dr. Edward M. Hallowell, a Harvard psychiatrist and the author of "Dare to Forgive." Forgiveness, he emphasizes, has to be cultivated; it goes against a natural human tendency to seek revenge and the redress of injustice. For that reason, he recommends doing it with help~~of friends, a therapist or through prayer.'

~Newsweek article, October 4, 2004

- Unconditional forgiveness means forgiving fully, without fully understanding.
- Please be patient with yourself. Forgiveness is mental, emotional and spiritual healing. For some it comes easy. For others, not so easy. If you have truly forgiven, you feel no pain associated with that person or event. You might

even feel better as an individual, enlightened, and stronger. However, it can take time.

“To forgive is to overlook. Look, then, beyond error and do not let your perception rest upon it, for you will believe what your perception holds.”

~A Course in Miracles, Chapter 9

- I believe that forgiveness is the light of God which eradicates fear, pain, unhappiness and darkness.
- Rather than be opposed to what happened, be in favor of a brighter future. I felt a release of pain when I chose to stop despising past wrongs and rather look forward to happier days.

“If your heart has room for a single enemy, then it is not a safe haven for a friend.”

~Anonymous

The key to my learning to forgive was the self realization that, nothing that someone else does or says, changes how I feel about myself. I determine through my behaviour how I feel about myself. If someone insults me, they have hurt themselves, they have not hurt me unless I subscribe to the belief that others control and determine who I am. If someone betrays me, their betrayal is the measure of themselves at that moment. It is not the measure of me. So, their betrayal of me has hurt themselves, it has not hurt me, unless I choose to let their betrayal make me think less of myself. Forgiving became easy, because I began to feel about the self-destructive behaviour of adults the same way I viewed the immature behaviour of children. You are only a victim if you choose to become a victim. As long as I continued my absolute belief that I am whole, then the hurt that someone sends my way is neither here nor there.

Empty your cup of yesterday's water. Empty your bowl of yesterday's rice. Empty your mind of yesterday's mistakes. Empty your spirit of yesterday's hurt. Detach from the event and the person who hurt you and simply choose not to be harmed or think further about the offense. The offender and the offense do not dictate your thoughts and feelings. No person or event should reduce how you feel about yourself or impact your happiness and peace of mind. It is how allow or choose this to happen that determines this.

Anger and pain. Grief, resentment. Getting even, seeing that they get their due. All this does is ensure that you will not live the proverbial “happily ever after” fairy-tale ending. The pain caused by non-forgiveness was like a never-ending bomb blast of destructiveness inside of me. The emotional shrapnel was absorbed by me. I was the first casualty of the conflict by living my pain and re-living the offense. Ironically, in my estimation, revenge is an impulse which does nothing to erase the offense or make you feel better about the situation or yourself. In fact, acting on resentment simply makes you feel worse about yourself. Why choose chaos when you can choose peace through forgiveness?

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.”

~St. Francis of Assis

- The biggest revelation that I experienced during my journey of forgiveness was:
- Forgiveness makes me emotionally indestructible.
- Forgiveness is good, it takes strength, it takes courage, it demonstrates enlightenment. It empowers.
- If you can forgive. Nobody can ever hurt you.

“Be assured that if you knew all, you would pardon all.”

-Thomas Kempis

One of the most frustrating things for me during my own personal journey of forgiveness, was the countless times people would tell me “You are choosing to suffer.” At the time I felt that the suffering had been forced on me. I felt like responding with “Does a cancer victim choose to suffer with cancer?” Because at the time I would have rather been a cancer victim than a survivor of betrayal. However, I began to reflect on this and realized that although the offense was forced on me, I was choosing to see myself as a victim. Once I let go of the pain and chose to view the offense as the offenders shaming themselves as opposed to me, I began to release my pain. My pain was not holding onto me. I was holding onto my pain. Forgiving was very much about finding a way to release the pain associated with the offense and reducing the emotional impact on myself.

What was damaged by the offense? My body? My soul? My essence? My ego? As the subject of the resentment and pain, am I not independent of the object's (the offender) blows? In other words, if someone calls you a jackass, does that mean that you have four legs and hooves? The offense is not powered by the object. It is given it's life by us as the subject of the insult. When I looked at my pain from this perspective, I realized that I was giving the pain life. If the offender desires to hurt us, then we are serving them by giving life to their insult or injury. By forgiving the offender's deficiency and recognizing that they hurt themselves by shaming themselves it becomes easier to overcome the injury.

We shall close our 100 random reflections on forgiveness with an unambiguous, majorly important, and defining teaching from our lord and savior.

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

- Matthew 6:14-15

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